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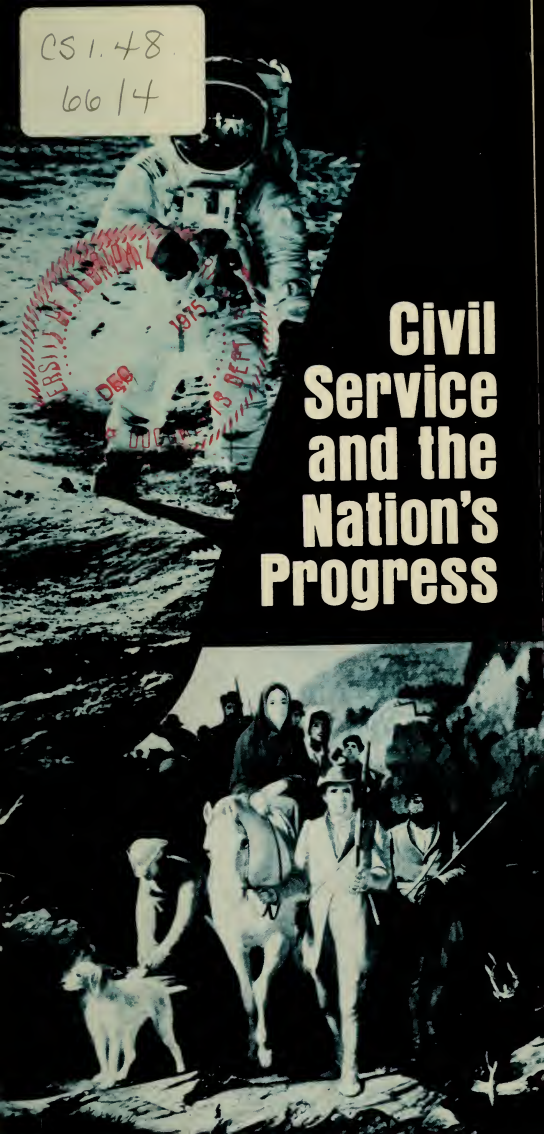

Civil Service and the Nation's Progress

Ousting the spoilsman

During this period of national bicentennial observances, the Federal civil service is proud to take its place among institutions that have made important contributions to building a better America. Through the "merit system," the backbone of today's civil service, Federal personnel practices reflect the ideals of equality and fairness that were fundamental to the founders of the new republic. For almost one hundred years, the merit system has played a vital role in building one of the finest governments in the world.

There was a time, however, when the merit system did not exist.

The year was 1881. The nation was well started on its second hundred years—and was on the move. There was room to grow, and the country was growing. The West was tamed and Horatio Alger heroes were young America's ideal.

Everything pointed to progress, with a notable exception—a weakness in government that embarrassed most Americans. The "spoilsmen" still rode in the driver's seat.

Many citizens wanted to change the system that fostered inefficiency and often dishonesty on the part of public servants appointed to office through the "spoils system," but they had not succeeded in putting a stop to the practice. Then, on a summer day in the Capital City, something happened that shocked the Nation.

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The President of the United States was assassinated by a madman who felt he was entitled to a public office as a political prize.

Aroused citizens everywhere showed by their ballots in the congressional elections of 1882 that they wanted civil service reform.

The Civil Service Act was signed into law January 16, 1883.

What the act did

To put it in the fewest possible words, the Civil Service Act brought MERIT to the public service.

Under the new law, applicants would have to demonstrate their fitness for a job in competitive entrance examinations—open to all citizens—ruling out such considerations as political influence, "who you know," and other nonmerit considerations. Appointments would be made from among those scoring highest in the tests.

Equally important, there would be no wholesale firings and restaffing when the political parties changed. This meant there would be continuity in Government, for the operating people in the competitive service would stay put when the leadership changed.

Not all Federal employees were placed "under civil service" at first. Only 10 per-

cent of the Federal work force was in the competitive service in 1883. But today, 90 percent of all Federal positions are under merit systems.

Expanding the act

The original Civil Service Act has stood the test of time. But by new laws and executive action the civil service system has been modified to improve the effectiveness of the Federal work force.

A retirement program was authorized so that employees could retire and live out their lives in dignity. From the start, the Federal employee has contributed to his own civil service retirement fund.

A job classification act was passed to provide equal pay for equal work.

Veterans were given preference for initial hiring and retention.

A training act was passed to prepare Federal employees to meet the challenge of changing times, to qualify for changing job requirements, and to prepare for promotion to greater responsibility.

An equal employment opportunity act was passed, further strengthening the merit system by requiring that all personnel actions be free of discrimination. The Act calls for affirmative action programs, establishes a discrimination complaint procedure, and gives broader enforcement

authority to the U.S. Civil Service Commission.

And a number of other features were added to provide a comprehensive and progressive employment system to attract well qualified people to *careers* in the Federal service.

Civil service today

America has continued to grow. In stature, in wealth, in productivity, and in democracy, America has been the pace setter among nations. As the Nation has grown, so has the Government—its missions multiplied, its personnel requirements made more varied and specialized to meet the changing needs of changing times.

Since World War II we have needed more than 2 million civil servants to carry out the Government programs authorized by law to serve the needs of the Nation and its people.

The work of civil servants touches the life of every American many times every day. Their role in the day-to-day business of Government is of vital importance in the attainment of national goals.

Career men and women engage in some of the world's most exciting and important work. They are plumbing the depths of the oceans, exploring the reaches of space. They are finding cures for deadly diseases, developing new ways to grow better crops.

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pride in serving their country and its people. The individual civil servant has many good reasons for being satisfied with his choice of the Federal Government as an employer.

Civil service work is *stimulating.* The rapid pace at which change is taking place keeps the civil servant on his toes to help provide the service America needs today and tomorrow.

Civil service work is *meaningful.* The nature of Government work is important. Whether the employee is engaged in finding a cure for cancer, launching a satellite, sending a social security check, or delivering the mail, his work matters.

Civil service work is *challenging.* Nearly all of today's mounting problems have their effect on Government. Civil servants face and meet challenging problems every day—and derive great satisfaction from solving them.

Civil service work is *satisfying.* Today's civil servant swims in the mainstream of progress. His associates are men and women he can respect and trust. His leadership is strong. His best effort is appreciated, rewarded, and expected.

Civil service work is *rewarding.* In addition to the nature of the work itself, civil service offers tangible attractions that compare favorably with those found in private employment. In general, pay is comparable to

salaries offered in industry for work of similar difficulty and responsibility. Opportunities for advancement are excellent for persons who demonstrate they are ready for more responsible assignments, and training programs are conducted to further career development. Federal employees earn liberal vacation and sick leave allowances, are members of a model retirement system, and are offered excellent life insurance and health benefits coverage for which the Government pays part of the cost.

But the greatest reward of all comes from service—service to all Americans.

For more information

If you wish more information about a specific program or specific jobs in the civil service, you may visit the personnel officer at a nearby Federal installation, you may write the U.S. Civil Service Commission, Washington, D.C. 20415, or you may write or visit a Federal job information center in your State.

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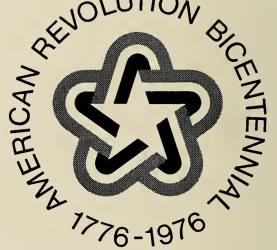

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